U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Science
Subcommittee on Energy
Subcommittee on Research

Fueling the Future: On the Road to the Hydrogen Economy

July 20, 2005

Statement of Chairman Bob Inglis

Good morning, and thank you Madam Chairman for bringing us together for our first hearing on the hydrogen economy this Congress. I am pleased that we have convened this joint hearing on an issue that I believe has the potential to be the next "giant leap for mankind."

The way I see it, there are three keys necessary to unlock the door to a full hydrogen economy: (1) commitment, (2) collaboration and (3) discovery.

We need a commitment in the U.S. similar to the one we made when President Kennedy challenged Congress in 1961 to land a man on the moon before the end of the decade. The President's Hydrogen Fuel Initiative and FreedomCar are steps in the right direction, and I welcome the testimony on the progress that has been made on these initiatives to date.

Strong public and private collaboration is imperative if we are to see real and, hopefully, ahead-of-schedule success. In my district, Clemson University is building the International Center for Automotive Research (ICAR), funded in significant part by BMW and Michelin. At ICAR, researchers will do what they do best; industry will do what it does best; and the markets will establish winners and losers. You will hear more about this collaborative effort today from Dr. David Bodde, Director of Innovation and Public Policy at ICAR.

The third key, discovery, is where our greatest challenges lie. That is why it is critically important that we fund basic research supporting the production, storage and distribution of hydrogen. The development of a hydrogen economy depends on breakthroughs in these areas. At the same time, we should also be pursuing other advanced technologies such as better batteries and photovoltaic cells that may take us to a new plateau of energy independence. One of these technologies may turn out to be the eight-track of the hydrogen economy. Another may be the cassette player. Yet another yet-unknown technology may prove to be the CD of automobiles, which, in turn, may be followed by the MP3.

The transition to a hydrogen economy holds great promise on many levels. All along the way, the air will be getting cleaner, the oil pressure will be coming off the Middle East, entrepreneurs will be making money and employing people, and we will be winning our energy independence. Admittedly, there are technology and cost challenges ahead of us, but I do not believe them to be insurmountable. In fact, I think we're definitely up to the challenge.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses on all of these issues.